

# Deepen the action

## Spread the support

by **Des Freedman**

This is a critical week for striking university staff fighting to defend pensions. The scale and energy of the strikes, and the inspiring level of support from students has forced the employers to the negotiating table. It has caused divisions between the biggest universities, who still want to scrap the current collective pension scheme, and those who are anxious to seek a settlement.

Talks at ACAS are due any day now and they must be premised on a return to the existing pension scheme. Anything less would be a travesty of the determination shown by striking staff.

The employers may be surprised by the scale of our action but they are not yet in full retreat. Indeed, some are threatening significant pay deductions for staff who refuse to reschedule classes lost as a result of the strike action. A minority are actually threatening to deduct 100% of our wages for what the employers describe as “partial performance” but what strikers call legitimate industrial action.

We need maximum unity to defeat these threats and to press home our advantage. Strike action shouldn't be called off until there is a firm guarantee that the existing defined benefits scheme is back on the table.

We also need to deepen the links with students motivated by a more general opposition to the encroachment of the market inside higher education.

The best defence against the employers' attacks are resilient branches and a mobilised membership. This dispute is already a real challenge to the market logic that allows employers to dictate what pensions and services are “affordable”.

That means we need bigger picket lines involving more members; more solidarity actions from supporters; and direct engagement with students, who are likely to have a growing number of questions as the dispute continues. And lecturers need to reach out to other groups of workers.

**COUNTERFIRE**